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The T'ai Chi Ch'uan  
of Tung Huling



## Editor's Notebook

# T'AI CHI

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### The T'ai Chi Of Tung Huling.

The teaching of Tung Huling and the Tung family is described in a memorial article by Wu Ta-yeh about his teacher, who died Nov. 29.

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See Page 2.

Tung Huling was a master of the art, very high in skills but very humble and low profile in his teaching.

I attended two of his classes in the basement of a Buddhist temple in Hawaii during two visits in the early 1970s. I had to look to see who was the teacher, finally seeing him teaching a couple of beginners over in a corner of the room.

Later, I saw a video of him doing the traditional Yang style that he taught. He did it fast and slow with great ease and strength in his movements. Aside from the natural grace, there was implied a great deal of power in reserve. At any moment, he looked as if he could do anything he wanted. To me, it was the highest standard of the traditional Yang style.

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Cover: Tung Huling.

# The T'ai Chi Ch'uan of Tung Huling

By Wu Ta-yeh

(1) Tung Huling (1917-1992) is one of the most distinguished masters of Taijiquan. His death is the greatest loss to the traditional Yang Chengfu style.

Born in the year of the tiger, he was named "Tiger Mountain" – "Hu" in his name means tiger and "ling" means mountain. He was born in Ren Xian of Hopei Province, near the home town of the founder of the Yang style, Yang Luchan.

His father, Tung Yingchieh (1886-1961) was the only person who had been with Yang Chengfu (1883-1936) for 20 years, starting as Yang's student in Beijing, and ending as Yang's assistant teacher for his classes in Guangzhou (Canton) until 1936, when Yang passed away.

In 1931, Tung Yingchieh wrote the text of the book, "Application of Taijiquan," using Yang's latest photographs and published in Shanghai with

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**Wu Ta-yeh teaches in Palo Alto, CA.**

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the joint authorship of Yang and Tung, and this book represented Yang's latest style.

He also accompanied Yang in traveling to various provinces and meeting many martial art experts of different schools. Because of the similarity of age and their long-time association, Tung automatically followed Yang's progressive improvements of the art from year to year.

While Chen Weiming (1881-1956) represented Yang Chengfu's earlier style in the 1920s, Tung Yingchieh and Tung Huling represented Yang's final style before Yang's death in 1936. (See my forthcoming article, "Yang Chengfu's Earlier and Latest Taijiquan," in T'AI CHI, April, 1993.)

After the death of Yang Chengfu in 1936, Tung Yingchieh continued to teach Yang's students in Guangzhou. During the Japanese invasion of China, which started in 1937, he taught in Hong Kong. During the second world war, he taught in Macau.

After the war, he returned to Hong Kong where he was joined by his eldest son, Huling, in 1947. Using Hong Kong as their base, they also taught by turn in Thailand, Malaya and Singapore.

Tung Yingchieh published a book on his own, "Taijiquan Explained," in 1948, and Tung Huling, a book, "Application of Taijiquan," in 1956.

After the death of his fa-



Tung Huling

ther in 1961, Tung Huling and his own son, Tung Kai-ying, continued to teach in Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. From 1968, Tung Huling also taught in Honolulu, in addition to the Far East area.

(2) As one of Master Tung Huling's students, I can only write of my experience in that capacity. Let me start by telling how he taught some of the more advanced methods.

One day, when the master demonstrated part 1 of Yang Chengfu's traditional Taijiquan, I stood at his left front in order to see clearly. In brushing his right thigh and pressing forth his left palm, his left shoulder blade seemed to extend a little more forward than usual, with his spirit and eyesight reaching forward. So, I imitated.

After the demonstration, he said, "Today, I added something new and nobody noticed. But I saw from the corner of my eyes that Mr. Wu noticed it and imitated." No one in the class asked what it was. But I knew I had



learned something new, and I had imitated correctly.

I practiced like this not only in this one posture, but gradually applied the principle to more and more postures. I found I had better balanced energy and spirit.

During the years as a student, I did not read any literature on Taijiquan. It was only after I had retired from regular work in 1972 that I collected all books and periodicals on the subject and studied them intensively. I noticed the term "hollow the chest, raise the back," first in the 12 essentials of Li Yiju (1832-1892) and then in Yang Chengfu's 10 essentials. The only explanation was in Chen Wei-ming's book of 1925, which was not clear. However, no other person offered a better explanation.

By then, I realized that what I learned from Master Tung Huling's demonstrations was exactly the method of doing this form. I found my internal energy circulated smoothly through my back, chest and arms, linking the energy developed at the legs, hips and waist, so that the whole body's energy is integrated.

In 1978, a new Taijiquan series based on Yang Chengfu's external forms and compiled by a committee of 10 experts was published in Taiwan. In the instructions of the book, they explained the term, "hollow the chest and raise the back," almost as flat chest and flat back, making it meaning-



less. In mainland China, there were outstanding experts condemning this form. Can it be true that, this form, so much emphasized by Yang Chengfu, got lost after Yang's death, and only was preserved by Tung Yingchieh and Tung Huling? Nobody knows.

To correct the views of the general public, I published an article in 1988, "Hollow the Chest, Raise the Back, and Issue Strength from the spine," in leading periodicals on Taijiquan and martial arts in Taiwan and Mainland China, explaining the prerequisites, the precautions, the methods of doing it, and its role in self-defense and health.

Included are concrete examples of doing this form in a number of specific postures. Nobody raised any objection.

The reason the real methods of doing this form had gotten lost is not because the great masters were keeping secrets. Before students really loosen the ligaments of their shoulder joints, doing this form will result in rigidity, producing tension, with negative effects on health and self-defense. This is why, in a class, Master Tung had to teach the form very tactfully, allowing students whose bodies are prepared to learn but without adversely affecting the others.

It takes a prolonged time for students to acquire the advanced and subtle techniques.

The prolonged war and the political changes after the death of Yang Chengfu did not allow a student to steadily learn from a distinguished master sufficiently to acquire these techniques. The Tung family was fortunate to be outside of China during this period so that they had the opportunity to transmit these higher techniques to their students.

(3) A second story which may be cited is that, once after the master returned



from Hong Kong, he said, "Today, I will teach you something new." He stood solemnly and did the first two postures, "Preparatory," and "Taijiquan Commencing," raising and lowering the arms extremely slowly. Nobody asked any question. After the master left, one of the senior students said, "Oh, after so many years of learning, there is still something new to learn. When can we finish."

I kept silent. I noticed the difference, but could not explain. Through the long time imitation and diligent practice, I found that my energy gradually improved during these movements. The two postures are correctly called "Preparatory" and "Taijiquan Commencing," for one starts the energy and gradually builds it up to be carried to the rest of the movements. When I wrote them down for class instructions and for our book manuscript, they turned out to be several typewritten pages.

Relative to the brief statements in all other Taijiquan books, my text can be considered voluminous. When we make use of the methods in teaching, telling what one would feel, inside the body, the beginning students perceive enough internal feelings during the first lesson to keep them interested. Yet even the advanced students find their feelings continue to intensify and their internal energy continues to improve during these postures.

This is another example to show that, like any fine art, even the best teacher cannot squeeze his knowledge and skill into the students. But per-



sons with the aptitude and interest and who are ripe enough will acquire it through imitation, diligent practice, and perception.

(4) Chen Xin (1848-1929) considered that the twisting strength, or *chansijin* as the central theme of Taijiquan, and he applied this strength to each of the Chen style postures. But the Chen style applies plenty of strength at the hands, so that the hands and fingers are curved backward. They also said the hands lead the body. Authors almost unanimously regarded this kind of strength not applicable to other styles where the hands are soft.

Tung Ying-chieh in his book of 1948 emphasized the twisting strength of the whole body. When this twisting strength of the waist is spiraled upward through the passive arms to the relaxed hands, the hands are soft, but still powerful. This is why the Taijiquan classic did not say "strength at the hands," but "manifested in the hands and fingers."

Applying the strong, twisting strength of the waist to spiral it upward to the passive arms and soft hands is exactly the way Master Tung Huling had been doing each movement.

When this twisting strength of his was "rooted at the feet, developed through the legs, directed by the waist, and manifested in the hands and fingers," exactly as written in the Taijiquan classic, his Taijiquan became

powerful, yet supple and looked soft. Combination of softness with strength in Taijiquan being the most difficult and much talked of techniques, Master Tung did it perfectly for each movement.

Onlookers who failed to link Master Tung's powerful trunk with his soft hands often called his hands magic hands. Allowing the hands to move passively following the major twisting of the waist can be done by many students through diligent practice.

When the twisting of the waist is very subtle, changing from one direction to another in very small arcs, and yet each small change is reflected and magnified in the hands, it requires a much higher accomplishment.

When the passive palms completely follow the waist in every small variation of the twisting, to move as if they are floating graceful in air, it is a rare accomplishment deserving the name magic hands. I have never seen or heard of any other Taijiquan practitioner doing like this.

Through careful observation and imitation of my teacher's demonstrations, I succeeded to incorporate this technique in my own daily Taijiquan practice, including the hands' responding to every minor change in the waist. But my hands are far from magical. However, my advanced students can also spiral the twisting strength from the waist to the forearms to effortlessly repulse an opponent without his feeling the least hurt.

In 1985, there was a series of articles in China discussing whether the twisting strength is applicable to other styles than the Chen style. Basing on the "Simplified Taijiquan" form, the majority said no. The very few authors who considered the

possibility could not explain concretely. I published a Chinese article, "Twisting and Folding Strength in the Yang Style," in Taiwan and Mainland China, 1986, explaining and illustrating the concrete methods of applying the techniques to the *traditional Yang style*. The article also explained that the same method could not be applied to the "Simplified Taijiquan," because their crude methods do not allow these subtle refinements.

When I sent a copy of the article to Ku Liuxing, who learned from Yang Chengfu and Chen Fake, and one of the co-authors of the standard work, "Chen Style Taijiquan," 1963, he agreed fully with my application of the twisting strength in the *traditional Yang style*. He also admitted certain imperfect treatment of the twisting strength in their Chen style book, as pointed out in my article. Ma Hung, president of the Chen Style Taijiquan Research Association in Shijiazhuang, the capital of Hopei Province, wrote me explaining that, although the Chen style books emphasized the twisting strength at the hands, their twisting strength is also based on the twisting of the waist, just as I described for the Yang style. Obviously, this art of twisting strength was transmitted from the Chen family to the founder of the Yang style, Yang Luchan, who learned the art in the Chen family. With the increased emphasis on suppleness, the Yang style removed any intentional strength at the hands, making them soft. When the soft hands of Master





Tung became completely passive, responding to even the smallest twisting of the waist, large and small, the hands became magical.

Can it be that the twisting strength is another area in Taijiquan which temporarily got lost in the Yang style during the 40 years of Taijiquan's dark age in China after the death of Yang Chengfu, and preserved only by the Tung family?

(5) The Taijiquan classic says, "First seek to be extended, later, seek to be compact, then it will be refined and impenetrable." In the extended form, you use the long foot steps and low stance. You always round the thighs to open the pelvis joints and circle your legs and feet in making foot-steps. You open your armpits and round our arms to move the hands in controlled circular paths. You find your internal energy flowing smoothly through every part of your body. While this is the basic training for your health, it allows you to incorporate the various refinements in your Taijiquan.

It is only after you are well trained in the extended form that you may start to practice the compact form. In the real compact form, you use shorter foot steps, but still in a low stance. You still separate your thighs, open your armpits, and round your arms to move your hands in controlled circular movements, just as you do in the extended form. This is a difficult job.

The solo Taijiquan taught by Yang Chengfu is the extended form for the general public. Tung Yingchieh, after having established himself, designed a compact form for the advanced students. Every posture is self-defense and is self-defense oriented. He used the slow-swift pattern, just as Taijiquan was done in the very early years, and called it Yingchieh fast Taijiquan. It is a combination of the short and low stance, and it includes all the other requirements as in Yang Chengfu's slow form. In Tung Yingchieh's instructions, he explained that, in this series, you store your energy in slow movements and issue your strength in fast movements, with much higher spirit. But unless one has at least three years of Taijiquan training, one cannot understand this series.

The chapter on Yingchieh's fast Taijiquan in Tung Yingchieh's book of 1948 was written by the son Tung

Huling, with the son's photographs. If one just tried to simply imitate the external forms of his photographs by bending the knees very low with the shorter footsteps, one will realize that the compact form is not for beginners but for the highly trained experts.

Combining short steps with low stance and still rounding the thighs and rounding the arms to circle the hand in all directions with full energy and spirit is even more difficult. It is incorrect to call the combination of short foot steps with an almost upright standing position a compact form.

In most cases, you twist your waist in smaller diameters and shorter circumference to spiral stronger strength to the limbs. With the rounded thighs, open armpits, and moving your arms in the usual circular paths, you feel tremendous energy circulating through your whole body. With the careful design of the forms and movements by the originator, you feel your powerful energy flowing from one posture to another continued even more naturally than in the regular Yang style solo form.

In Master Tung's demonstrations, he moved leisurely with full concentration and spirit for a few consecutive movements, followed by a few speedy moves. He also included leaping and whirling his body to turn to different directions. His demonstrations were so lively and vivid that they were a very high level artistic presentation.

Tung Yingchieh had a motto for practicing Taijiquan: "Follow the rules, be skillful with the rules, digest the rules, spiritualize the rules, never deviate from the rules." He said, "Having become skillful, you just follow your mind. Your movement and quiescence, firmness and lightness, opening and closing, Yin and Yang, will be all in order and your spirit will be fully expressed." This is exactly a description of the accomplishment of his son, Mas-



ter Tung Huling. In his spirited demonstrations, not for teaching, it appeared as if he was doing anything he liked, yet every form and movement conforms fully to the Taijiquan principles.

Once when Master Tung and I were invited to demonstrate in an all-American party in Honolulu, the host assumed that he was supposed to do it on a small, raised platform which was for the delivery of speeches by a single speaker. Master Tung did not hesitate, but walked up and still used the fairly long foot stance, low profile, rounded thighs, and circled his arms in graceful circles. Instead of shortening his foot stance in a restricted area, he just changed some of the forward steps to rearward or sidewise steps. There were no modifications of his forms, and everything was still fully based on the Taijiquan principles, so that you did not feel that he was compromising. With all strength coming from his waist, his movements were still powerful, spirited, and aesthetic. This is an example of spiritualizing the rules without deviating from the rules. But in the party, I had to clear a large space to demonstrate the sword and

falchion (broadsword, or knife).

In Master Tung's self-defense, you do not see the textbook methods such as warding, pulling, squeezing, pressing, shouldering, elbowing, etc., which are the standard methods in tournaments. In close range and with powerful strength at his extremely pliable waist, he can do anything to defeat an opponent without his opponent realizing how he was defeated. This is again spiritualization without deviating from the rules. In teaching and demonstration, of course, one did not see such feats.

(6) Perhaps Master Tung's accomplishment and spirit can be more easily appreciated in his Taiji sword by the less trained observers. I do not have the vocabulary to describe his superb achievement. The great poet Du Fu of the Tang Dynasty had a poem, "On observing the sword performance of Lady Gungsun," with lavish expressions such as "a god riding on a dragon through the sky," and "lightning and thunder striking heaven and earth." Such poet's impressions apply to Tung's performance perfectly. With varied speed, gestures, expression, concentration, power, spirit, and circling in large and small diameters, each movement is with the integrated supple strength of the whole body spiraled upward through the arm to the weapon. Every detail is the real Taiji sword demonstrated with the best artistic taste. This is the meaning of spiritualization without deviating from the rules.

In our classes, students usually begged him to demonstrate something. He would ask, "to demonstrate what?" Because I liked his sword the best, I would say, "the sword." He would ask, "in what way?" The class would say, "slow and fast." His movements in slow-drift pattern were the most beautiful with high spirit. When he held the sword and stood in place, he would say, "Today, I must try some-

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**In close range and with powerful strength at his extremely pliable waist, he can do anything to defeat an opponent without his opponent realizing how he was defeated.**

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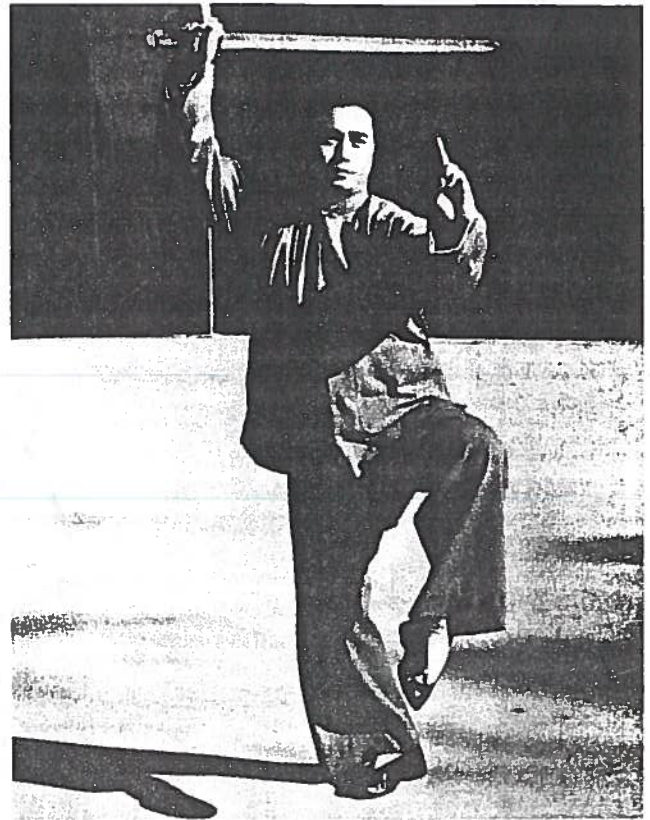
thing new, or you would steal all of them." When he demonstrated, there was actually something new each time.

After I returned home, I always practiced the new movements diligently until skillful, and then incorporated them into the regular series until the whole thing was harmonious and smooth. When I demonstrated in the next session of the class, the new movements were there. The whole class would hail me at the new movements. I always immediately cried, "I stole it," for I did not want the class to think that I learned privately from him. This way, I learned more and more of his special movements.

If he had formally taught these special movements in the class, he would have to explain everything in detail and make endless corrections in many subsequent classes, and the result would still not be satisfactory. In this way, he still passed his techniques to those who are ready to learn without anybody feeling discrimination. Students also enjoyed the fun in the class.

It is not true that when you stole from him, he would not help you to improve. If you could do the stolen movements sufficiently well with only minor deficiency, he would tell you how to improve. For example, in the sword series, there is an occasion when you walk forward three steps, left foot, right foot, left foot again. In one of his demonstrations, he changed the two left foot steps into leaping. I liked these vivid movements and practiced well. When I demonstrated in the next class, I changed all the three steps into leaping. After I finished, he said, if I leaped only twice, with the second step remaining walking, I could do better. When I practiced at home, I found that he was correct, for I became more leisurely with better spirit. So, more is not better.

Each time he demonstrated, he added only one or at most two of his special movements. When I tried to add more of his special movements, I found the result was not good. Again,



more is not better.

When I tried to innovate some of the special movements myself, the result was not good either. This is the difference between a great master and a student.

(7) Postscript: Despite Master Tung's superb accomplishment, he was very modest and never talked about his own achievements. Because of this attitude of his, his students also did not publicize him or create an image for him. This is the reason why he has been little known in the United States as compared to other Taijiquan teachers. He never criticized other styles or other teachers. In fact, he never said, "Wrong," to his students, but just made the correction. This attitude perhaps reflects his mature training in Taijiquan.

The grandmaster's son, Tung Kaiying, after having taught in Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Honolulu, has taught in Los Angeles since 1971 the same latest Yang Chengfu style as his grandfather and father taught. He also travels to teach in San Francisco. In addition to holding seminars and workshops in various cities in the United States, he also travels three times a year to teach in several countries in Europe, including Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland. ●



# Tung Huling Dies in Hawaii

The well-known and highly esteemed Taijiquan grandmaster Tung Huling (1917-1992), who taught Yang Cheng-fu's traditional style in Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and the United States, died from diabetes mellitus on Nov. 29, 1992, in the St. Francisco Hospital, Honolulu.

The funeral services held on December 5 at Borth Wick Mortuary was attended by a few hundred friends and students, and also by his sister, Jasmine Tung (Mrs. Chen) who arrived from Hong Kong, and his eldest son, Tung Kai-ying, from Los Angeles, and his second son, Dong Zhengchen, Hawaii.

Burial took place December 5 in the Hawaii Memorial Park. Memorial services were held in Hong Kong, Bangkok, Malaysia, and Singapore, in December 1992.

The grandmaster's father, Tung Yingchieh, was the only person who had been with Yang Chengfu for 20 years, first as his student and then as his most trustworthy teaching assistant until Yang's death in 1936. Being the eldest son, grandmaster Tung Huling learned everything his father knew. Tung Huling published a book, "Application of Taijiquan," in 1956.

The eldest of six children, he was born on October 25, 1917, at Ren Xian Cheng, Xing Tai, He Bei, China. He loved the martial arts when he was



Tung Huling

young and started his training under several well-known teachers.

He learned T'ai Chi Ch'uan from his father, Tung Yingchieh, and received personal instruction from his father's teacher, Yang Chengfu. In contrast to today's typically rapid pace of instruction, he learned the art over a long period of time.

He began to learn push hands after practicing the slow set for eight years. He learned the sword set after 10 years and the knife after 14. Since the only weapons his father practiced were the sword and the spear, he learned the knife from his uncle.

In his adult years, Tung Huling taught T'ai Chi Ch'uan in He Be province, Canton, Shanghai and other cities in China. In 1947, he moved to

Hong Kong to assist his father in teaching the art.

Using Hong Kong as his base, in 1953 he began teaching in Thailand and later went on to instruct in Singapore and other parts of Southeast Asia.

He traveled to Hawaii, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York to promote the art in 1967. A July 1967 article in Black Belt magazine featured a story on him.

He moved to Hawaii in 1968 to establish a school and promote the art in America. The next year he brought over his eldest son, Kai-ying Tung, who went on to live and teach T'ai Chi Ch'uan in Los Angeles, other parts of the U.S., Europe and Asia.

During his many years in

Honolulu, Tung taught T'ai Chi Ch'uan to many people and also practiced acupuncture with great success. From time to time he would travel back to Asia to conduct classes and promote the art.

Many stories are told about his mastery. Here is one:

"It seems that a big strong hard stylist came to watch the T'ai Chi class in Honolulu in order to observe Tung Huling's legendary skill. After the class was over he approached Master Tung and asked for a demonstration. Tung held out his open palm and asked the man to punch it, which he did with as much power as he could muster. Tung asked him what he felt. He replied, 'Nothing,' and he walked away wondering why this person was so famous.

"The next day the man returned to Tung's class. But rather than arrogant, he now appeared quite humble. 'My arm hurts terribly. What did you do to it?' he asked. Tung replied that he had simply used his internal skill to reflect back the man's power. So, in effect, the man had punched himself."

Although Tung stopped actively teaching in Hawaii in 1982, his students continued practicing together. In 1983, he was able to bring to Honolulu his youngest son, Dong Zeng Chen, from the family's home in Ren Xian Cheng, China. Dong has continued the family's teaching in Hawaii and also conducts classes in Europe and Asia.

After he retired, Tung continued to travel in the U.S. and Asia, visiting friends, relatives and students.

Tung Huling's include: Kai-ying Tung's family, which include: his daughter-in-law, Charmmie; and grandchildren: Sara, Chen-wei, Esther and Christina, all in Los Angeles; Dong Zeng Chen and his son, Alex Da De Dong; his brother, Tung Jung Bo; sisters, Tung Wah and Jasmine Chan; wife, Li Feng; daughters, Dong Shio Rung and Dong Xiao Rung, and sixteen grandchildren.

For Tung Huling's accomplishments in Taijiquan, see a separate article by Wu Ta-yeh in this issue of T'AI CHI. ●

Contributors to this obituary are the family of Tung Huling, Wu Ta-yeh, and Henry "Chip" Ellis. ●

